The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader McConnell:

The undersigned organizations represent a wide variety of criminal justice, workforce development, antipoverty, and racial equity stakeholders and advocates. **We are writing to urge you to ensure youth and adults impacted by the criminal legal system remain a priority in the American Jobs plan.**

We are pleased to see the President call for "Congress to invest $100 billion in proven workforce development programs targeted at underserved groups" in the American Jobs Plan. We are particularly pleased to see the President call on Congress "to invest in job training for formerly incarcerated individuals and justice-involved youth and in improving public safety," including "$5 billion over eight years in support of evidence-based community violence prevention programs." This community-based violence prevention funding should support and expand access to a range of needed reentry supports and career pathway workforce development opportunities for youth and adults impacted by the criminal legal system. This long-overdue funding will be crucial to ensuring an equitable recovery.

However, we specifically want to ensure individuals impacted by the criminal legal system receive targeted workforce development services, and urge you to significantly increase funding for the current workforce development system, as well as ensure that this population is a target group for any new job creation and subsidized employment efforts. Ensuring that people impacted by the criminal legal system have access to quality workforce training and employment opportunities is imperative to redressing systemic racism and advancing racial equity.

Investing in youth and adults impacted by the criminal legal system is imperative to an equitable recovery.

Due to systemic divestment of Black and Brown communities and racist law-and-order policies, people of color have been grossly targeted by our nation's criminal legal system. These structural barriers have made it difficult for those with a criminal record to obtain quality employment and achieve economic security. Ensuring those with criminal legal histories can access economic opportunity will help redress some of our nation's deep racial inequities, especially as 1 in 3 adults in the U.S. has an arrest or conviction record.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, formerly incarcerated individuals were unemployed at a rate of over 27 percent, with the rate disproportionately higher for Black men and Black women at 35.2 and 43.6 percent, respectively. This pre-pandemic unemployment rate of 27 percent, which is nearly five times higher than the rate for the U.S. population, is due to structural barriers, such as labor market discrimination, arbitrary licensing bans, and more, that preclude formerly incarcerated individuals from working. Furthermore, research shows that when formerly incarcerated people do find work, they are more likely to be jobs paying low wages, with their median wages just $10,090 within the first year of returning to their communities.

While the pandemic has been devastating to many Americans, we know that those impacted by the criminal legal system have been disproportionately impacted and may have a more difficult time finding employment, including those who have recently returned to their communities. The federal government must provide the crucial investment in ensuring youth and adults impacted by the criminal legal system are able to access jobs with family sustaining wages and benefits both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring their needs are prioritized in the American Jobs plan.

Increase existing workforce development funding.

We support significantly raising existing funding by a minimum of $15 billion through the Relaunching America's Workforce Act (RAWA) as well as a dedicated $500 million for the Department of Labor's (DOL) Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) program.

RAWA includes significant funding for the public workforce system that serves many youth and adults impacted by the criminal legal system, including $100 million to support much needed correctional education. However, because of the pandemic's disparate impact on those impacted by the criminal legal system, we are requesting additional support for the REO program.

The REO program provides grants to nonprofit workforce development organizations to provide employment and reentry services for adults and youth with criminal legal histories and for

youth who have not completed school. There is a priority for projects serving high-crime, high-poverty areas, and communities that have recently experienced significant unrest. REO grantees work closely with people with criminal legal histories who need employment training as well as with employers to help them identify the skilled and credentialed workers they need to fill current positions.

However, despite the dramatic and devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, reentry service providers have gotten little additional support to support their clients. A survey from the Council of State Governments recently found that 75 percent of reentry providers had to stop providing services or closed entirely during the pandemic. Providing additional funding for the REO program at the Department of Labor would help support critical reentry and workforce services that are needed for an equitable recovery.

Ensure youth and adults impacted by the criminal legal system are a target population in job creation and subsidized employment efforts.

As the President calls on Congress to invest in job creation strategies through investments in the physical and care infrastructure as well as urges Congress to "tackle long-term unemployment and underemployment through a new subsidized jobs program," youth and adults impacted by the criminal legal system must be able to fully and equitably access these opportunities.

We urge Congress to invest in and scale an equity-centered national subsidized employment program that targets communities historically excluded from economic opportunity, especially those with a criminal legal history.

Subsidized employment has proven to be an effective strategy for supporting those impacted by the criminal legal system, even during the pandemic. Safer Foundation operates a transitional employment program that places impacted people in subsidized employment opportunities. The Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) partners with state departments of transportation to provide transitional employment and build employment pipelines for transportation sectors. These reentry and workforce development providers combine credential attainment with paid wages and have continued connecting people with criminal legal histories to career pathway employment while filling jobs that employers need filled with credentialed and trained personnel. Such opportunities should be scaled up nationwide.

We thank you for your leadership and look forward to working with you to ensure this community is supported by policymakers in the recovery. If you would like to discuss this issue further or have any questions, please contact Duy Pham at dpham@clasp.org.

Sincerely,

A Little Piece Of Light

American Federation of Teachers

Amity Foundation

Appetite For Change

Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)

Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation

Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network

BeProximate Center for People | Transformative Justice | Faith

Californians for Safety & Justice

Capital Workforce Partners

Cara Collective

Career Resources, Inc.

Center for Employment Opportunities

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Child Welfare League of America

Church World Service

Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

College and Community Fellowship

CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants)

Defy Ventures

Dream Corps JUSTICEEmpowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)

Feminist Majority Foundation

Filling the Gap

First Focus Campaign for Children

First Step Alliance

Formerly Incarcerated Union of Rhode Island

Fresno State-Project Rebound

Futures Without Violence

Gathering for Justice

Grossmont College

HMSA - Health Management Systems of America

Hudson Link for Higher Education in Prison

Human Resources Agency, Inc. (HRA)

Jobs For the Future (JFF)

Justice For Families

Justice Scholars

JustLeadership USA

Law Enforcement Action Partnership

Legal Action Center and National H.I.R.E. Network

Los Angeles Regional Reentry Partnership

MCCB Transitions Inc

Melanie Bates Consulting, LLC

Michigan Center for Youth Justice

MomsRising

Montgomery College

Mourning Our Losses

My New Journeys

National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE)

National Association of Counsel for Children

National Center for Lesbian Rights

National Council of Churches

National Crittenton

National Immigration Law Center (NILC)

National Juvenile Defender Center

National Juvenile Justice Network

National Organization for Women

National Youth Employment Coalition

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

New Earth Organization

Next100

Operation Restoration

Opportunity Youth United

Opportunity Youth United

Our Piece of the Pie, Inc.

Oxfam America

Philadelphia Youth Network

Prison Education Project, University of Arizona

Prison Scholar Fund

Project Reboud-California State University Fresno

REDF

Remerg

ReNForce

Results for America

Safer Foundation

Second Chance Center

Second Chance Educational Alliance, Inc.

SJSU Record Clearance Project

Sociology and Criminology Club

Stand for Children

Students for Sensible Drug Policy

Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP)

The Dont Look Back Center Inc

The National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly

The Sentencing Project

TURNING POINT ALCOHOL AND DRUG EDUCATION PROGRAM,INC

Union for Reform Judaism

Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs

Whole Systems Learning

Workforce Dev. Council of Seattle-King County

Young Invincibles

Youngsters for Change

Youth Justice Initiative, Columbia Justice Lab